

## **Growing Collaborative Skills through Experience and Training**

EPA Region 7 – Kansas City, Kansas

**Description of activity:** Region 7 is committed to developing the collaborations skills necessary to meet our Strategic Goals. The Strategy for Human Capital, Goal 5 envisions a workplace where employees work with internal and external partners to achieve environmental results. The Region regards the development and successful demonstration of these skills as fundamental to environmental results. In FY 2007, the Region began a new skill development program for facilitators, held mandatory media skills training for managers and offered a notable workshop for employees who facilitate community collaboration and problem-solving.

Advanced Facilitation Development Program – Led by two master facilitators from Region 7, a group of 18 experienced facilitators began a 12-month curriculum to practice, fine tune and master their facilitation skills. Developed by the Region's master facilitators, the program includes assessment, group coaching and feedback, and homework assignments. Each month a challenge is given and each month there is an opportunity for group members to share their facilitation experiences. The participants include leaders of collaborative efforts with outside organizations or groups, those skilled in small group facilitation and desiring large group experience, and people interested in facilitation within EPA. All of the community involvement coordinators supporting the Superfund program are participating.

Media Training for Senior Executives and Managers – All members of Senior Staff participated in a 2-day Media Training early in the year to support a new active role in the public outreach by the Senior Managers. The training provided several opportunities to practice "on-camera" skills and receive feedback to build improvement. Senior leaders enlisted the trainer to return and provide a course for all managers and a selection of employees likely to meet the press. In addition, the Region offered the annual locally developed basic media skills training as part of the all-employee curriculum. The return on this investment is immediately noted in the FY 2007 accomplishments. In particular, the expert handling of the media and Congressional staff at the time of flooding in the Coffeyville, KS area ensured the health and safety of residents and engendered trust of the multi-agency federal effort underway. Many programs benefited from the increased skill levels of employees and managers in speaking to the public through the media.

Collaboration and Community Participation Workshop – Region 7's Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) program and the Office of Public Affairs sponsored a three-day workshop on creating and sustaining collaborative partnerships among residents, business and civic leaders, government and other organization in order to reduce risk from environmental toxics. Dr. Michael Elliott, a principal with the Southeast Negotiation Network and an associate professor in city and regional planning at Georgia Tech, served as instructor, mentor and coach to participants. The 18 participants included EPA employees as well as state and community partners who work to facilitate groups with divergent perspectives. Participants included the new CARE project officers for the latest grants in St. Louis and Iowa who will immediately put these skills to work in FY 2008.